At the Grass-Roots:
Kathryn Kuhlman's Pentecostal-Charismatic Influence on Historic Mainstream Churches

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Kathryn Kuhlman (1907-1976) was one of the most enigmatic and controversial preachers of the twentieth century. Finding it difficult to define her ministry and place her in one of the Evangelical camps, many Kuhlman watchers simply counted her with faith healers because of her "miracle services." 1 Despite all the hype about Kuhlman's healing services and her best-selling books of testimonials from people who claimed they were healed under her ministry, 2 it should be noted that she was more than a faith healer—a term she hated—and more than an evangelist—a term she sometimes tolerated. At the grass-roots of mainstream Protestant and Catholic churches she brought people together, poured balm into their religious wounds, and shaped opinions and practices as an ecumenist and Evangelical-Pentecostal ambassador—although she described her ministry as one who simply carried "a water bucket for the Lord," and as "a handmaiden of the Lord." 3 The stated purpose of the Kathryn Kuhlman Foundation remains characteristically non-sectarian: "To promote, foster and interpret Christianity to the world and engage in other religious, charitable and educational activities." 4 Any designation of Kuhlman as

1 A few video tapes of Kuhlman in action during high energy miracle services have been marketed in recent years by Ralph Wilkerson of Melodyland in Anaheim, California, and Dan Malachuk, former head of the defunct Logos, International. In 1994 the Kathryn Kuhlman Foundation, Pittsburgh, began marketing "Dry Land... Living Water," the miracle service video which was taped in Las Vegas, May 3, 1975. The weekly studio-produced television series, "I Believe in Miracles," differed greatly from the miracle services, utilizing Kuhlman's theatrics in a simple music and interview format rather than the typical marathon worship and healing format in the auditoriums. About 500 of the studio produced programs can be seen (but not reproduced) on video at the Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois. Because the tapes are preserved in cold storage, the Archives requires 2-3 days' notice for viewing them. Currently Benny Hinn's auditorium service format is almost a carbon copy of Kuhlman's miracle service of twenty years ago—even with some of the same personnel and theatrics. But old-time Kuhlman followers are divided on whether they like the Kuhlman-Hinn comparison.


3 Helen Kooiman Hosier, Kathryn Kuhlman, The Life She Led, the Legacy She Left (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976), 46, 47.

ecumenist and ambassador is entirely unofficial inasmuch as she chose to remain independent of organized ecumenical efforts, denominational membership, and inter-denominational organizations—such as the National Association of Evangelicals and the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America.

Had she belonged to a Pentecostal or Evangelical organization in the 1960s, she doubtless would have been censured or even dismissed for opening her doors to all faiths and then sending them back to their own churches rather than channeling them into “Bible-believing” churches. Despite her non-participation in organized activities, her inter-church popularity in weekly Pittsburgh meetings was such that the audience at times was 60% Catholic. The remaining 40% were from mainstream Protestant churches, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, non-denominational, Pentecostal, and other Evangelical communities. Some who had no religious connection were also attracted. The Protestant percentage increased in other cities—such as in Los Angeles for her monthly meetings at the Shrine Auditorium where the Catholic concentration was not so large as that in Pittsburgh.

Jean Waltz, who ministered to Catholics on the West Coast and supported Kuhlman, perhaps best-described the miracle services as “the market place” because of the denominational mix. And Kuhlman boasted, “Everybody forgets their denominational ties. We worship together on the common ground of Calvary.” Perhaps in an effort to show the diversity of denominations represented in her meetings, Kuhlman frequently asked people who came to the platform about their church affiliation.

Along with the diverse religious background came people from a wide socioeconomic level, a mix seldom found elsewhere. The poor and minorities were there along with middle and upper middle-class...